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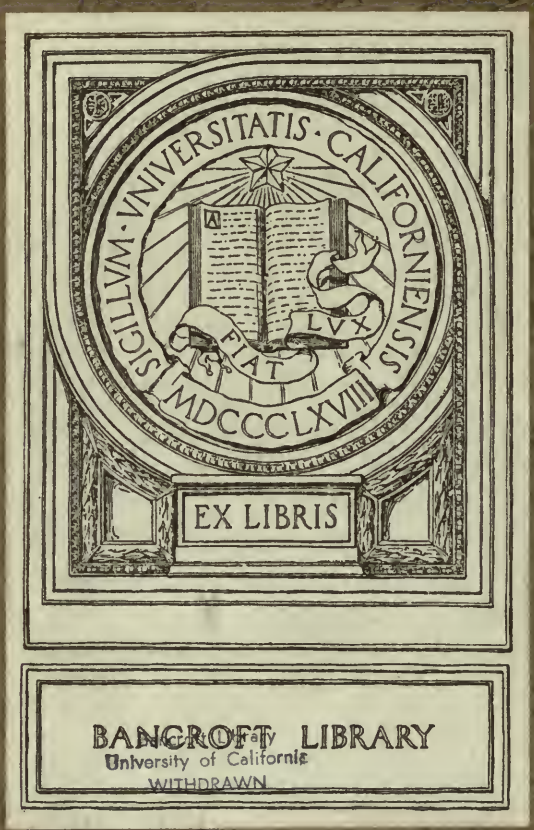

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The Chilean Educational System, with Especial Reference to the Position of the University

By
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THE CHILEAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM, WITH ESPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE POSITION OF THE UNIVERSITY

Chilean writers look upon the year 1813 as that which marked the beginning of their educational system. It was then that the revolutionary government, though at that very time in the thick of the War of Independence against Spain, saw fit to found the Instituto Nacional (National Institute). To be sure, something had existed in the colonial period, but, except for the old University of San Felipe, scarcely anything worthy of mention. As a result of the disasters to the patriot cause in the year 1814 the Instituto Nacional was closed, but reopened in 1819, since which time it has had a continuous existence.

In name the University of San Felipe lived on, for a few years, but the Instituto Nacional now monopolized higher education, serving both as a *liceo* (high school) and university in one. In 1839 the University of San Felipe was formally closed. In 1842 the University of Chile was founded, and in 1843 began to function. Henceforth the Instituto Nacional remained as a *liceo* only, and today is but one out of ninety. Its fame, however, is quite on a par with that of the University, not only because it was itself the university in earlier years, but also because by far the greater number of the most distinguished men in the history of Chile have received their education within its walls.

Since the University was founded, there have been twelve Rectors, or Presidents. Among the earlier Rectors the names of Andrés Bello and Barros Arana, respectively first and seventh, strike the attention of one who is looking over the list. Bello, though a native of Venezuela, belongs to Chile as a literary figure. His is perhaps the greatest name in the history of Chilean literature. Barros Arana is remembered primarily as one of the greatest historians that Chile has produced. Worthy compatriots of these men are the two latest of the "twelve Apostles", Valentín Letelier and Domingo Amunátegui, respectively eleventh and twelfth of the Rectors of the University. Letelier was a profound scholar, author of learned works on education,

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historical method, and law. Amunátegui has been Rector of the University since 1911. A member of a family which has been unusually distinguished in the history of Chilean education and historiography, he has won renown in his own right which will inevitably entitle him to rank among the leading men of letters of Chile. As administrator, teacher, and historical scholar he would stand among the foremost in any country of the world. Withal he is possessed of such a fund of amiability as to win the unaffected devotion and friendship of all who are privileged to know him.[1]

Four facts about present-day education in Chile impress themselves upon the investigator: the honored position of the "professor", including in that title all teachers, from the university to the primary school; the position and power of the University of Chile; the Germanic character of the system as a whole and of the methods of instruction; and the enthusiastic progress that is being made.

In Chile the "professor" is a person of distinction and influence, especially the favored group of those who obtain posts in Santiago. It is no uncommon thing for, let us say, a normal-school teacher to hobnob with ministers of state or even the President of the country himself. This is a pleasing surprise to the American professor who sees it for the first time. On the other hand, the Chileans get more glory than pay. Very few of the university professors, for example, are able to make a living out of their profession; they find it necessary to do something in addition, such as practice law or medicine or teach in secondary schools. Poorly as American teachers are paid, they nevertheless are in this particular in a better position than their brethren in Chile.

Unlike our own system of local responsibility for education, that of Chile is wholly under the control of the national government; even a primary school in an obscure village responds to orders, not from some local board, but from the ministry of education in Santiago. At the head of the system—one is half inclined to say nominally at the head—stands the Minister of Justice and Public Instruction. Chilean ministries rise and fall with such startling rapidity, in obedience to the parliamentary type of government which obtains in the country, that it is almost impossible for a cabinet member to become thoroughly

[1] This article in its preliminary form had the advantage of the constructive criticism of Señor Amunátegui, and such value as it may have is due primarily to him. It is needless to add that the above comments on Señor Amunátegui himself did not appear in the draft that he saw.

acquainted, even, with his own department. This has caused foreign students to believe, mistakenly, that this country is in a state of perpetual administrative chaos. The truth is that government goes on in spite of changing ministries, because the employes of lesser rank than the minister are appointed for life. There is no such thing as a "house-cleaning" on the advent to power of some hitherto minority party. Removals can take place, to be sure, but only for cause. The rule of life employment is very fairly observed. Indeed, one of the most important functions of a minister is to appoint his own political adherents to posts that have automatically become vacant, thus preserving his influence and that of his party after both have fallen from power.

This may be illustrated by the case of education. The various ministers in that branch have policies which change as rapidly as do the ministers. Next in rank to them comes the sub-secretary of education, the actual directing force of the system, and he remains. So too with other important officials, such as the sub-secretary of secondary and higher education and the inspector of primary schools. The last named official, for example, is a virtual dictator over the primary schools of the entire country. Under him are some 7,000 teachers, whom in first instance he appoints (whenever there is a vacancy) and whom he may dismiss for cause. It is true that his acts must be approved by the minister, but in practice they are.

From the foregoing one can easily see why it is that the University of Chile should hold such a powerful place in the educational affairs of the country. The Rector and the university professors are the only individuals of educational prestige who are constantly before the eyes of the public. To be sure, many of the officials in the educational bureaucracy are men of great distinction, but the system does not necessarily require them so to be, and their position is such that they inevitably prefer to do their work quietly, without seeking fame or risking denunciation. Thus it is that the opinions of the Rector or of the Council of the University have great weight. Furthermore, vast powers have been granted to the University, so that on the one hand it possesses extraordinary liberty in its internal government and on the other has a very nearly dominant place over the other schools below it. It is doubtful if any university in the world exercises so wide an authority.

By law the University is subordinate to the Minister of Justice and Public Instruction. In fact it is virtually independent. The most important governing body of the University is the Council, made up of the Minister of Justice and Public Instruction, the Rector of the

University, the Secretary General of the University, the five Deans of the University, the Rector of the Instituto Nacional, three members named by the President of Chile, and two named by the Cloister (or faculty) of the University—fourteen in all. This body is in a sense the legislature of the entire educational system in Chile as well as of the University. The Minister might refuse to follow its advice, but he rarely does, unless it is in conflict with his own educational policy. From the very composition of the Council, it is easy to see that the Rector of the University would in fact be the dominating power. He also has a virtually determining influence, in company with the two members from the Cloister, over all administrative appointments within the University and all appointments of teachers to the *liceos*. He and his two associates place five names in nomination, from which the Council selects three, and the President of the country (or the Minister of Justice and Public Instruction) one. It is the custom for the Rector to indicate his choice by the order in which he lists his nominees; it is said that the names after the first often represent persons who it is known would not accept the appointment if it were proffered. At any rate his candidates are almost invariably selected. Indeed, certainly so far as the learned and amiable gentleman now at the head of the University is concerned, the Rector may be said to be easily the most important figure in the national educational system, for, subject though he is to the Council, he in fact has the support of that body.

Within the University itself the faculty has such power as is almost undreamed of in the United States. The whole body of the faculty forms the Cloister, to which also belong certain distinguished scholars who, though they are not teachers in the University, are elected by the Cloister itself to membership therein; in their case election to the Cloister is equivalent in Chile to becoming an Academician in such countries as France and Spain. In the main, perhaps, the meetings of the Cloister are of the same harmless variety as the typical faculty meetings in universities of the United States, but it has several very important functions. It elects the two members of the Council who join with the Rector in the making of appointments in first instance, as described above, and who therefore give the faculty a voice in the deliberations of the powerful Council. In like manner the Cloister elects the Secretary General of the University, who also sits with the Council. Of still more import, it elects the Rector of the University himself! Still further, the Rector as such is the only member of the faculty who does not hold a life appointment. His term of

office runs for but four years. It has been the custom, however, to reëlect the Rector. Señor Amunátegui is now in his third term, and is universally popular.

In yet other ways, though in many of them apart from the Cloister, the members of the faculty have a wide-reaching authority. The University controls secondary education in that the teachers of *liceos* must have a "title", or degree, authorizing them to teach, and this can be obtained only from the University of Chile. But the student cannot possibly receive his title unless first he wins the approbation of his individual professors. In like manner the University and the members of the faculty have vast power over the medical profession, for here, too, the degree of the University is a license to practice and is the only license that is given. Thus the faculty of the University has a function in Chile which in the United States is reserved by the government to itself. The University alone can grant titles in various other professions—engineering, for example—but their acquisition is not required, wherefore one need not attend the University of Chile to study these branches. Finally, the faculty, this time in the meetings of the Cloister, decides on appointments to its own body whenever any vacancy in the teaching staff occurs. Whatever the law on the point may be, it is the fact that these elections are determining.

It is to be remembered, too, that the University of Chile occupies a unique place among the higher institutions of learning. A little farther up the Alameda de Delicias, the broad avenue upon which the University faces, is the Catholic University of Chile, which duplicates many of the courses in the national university. Nevertheless, it may not grant "titles", wherefore it necessarily suffers by comparison with the University of Chile. A private university has recently been established at Concepción in southern Chile, but this has yet to win a share in the extraordinary power now possessed by the University of Chile alone.

Through the Council the University of Chile has very great power over primary education, but less, however, than over the secondary schools. Aspirants for the title of primary school teacher do not enter the University, but go instead to some one of the various normal schools. Naturally, the amount of preparation required of a primary school teacher is less by several years than for the teachers in secondary education. To a certain extent the power of the normal schools in primary education resembles that of the University in the case of the *liceos*, since they have the sole power to grant or withhold titles. There

are a number of normal schools, however, instead of one central institution, and this makes it easier for the government inspector of primary schools to wield a power of which the official in charge of university and secondary education would never dream.

The University seal has five symbols to represent the different colleges of which it is composed. These are Theology, Law, Medicine, Engineering, and Philosophy and the Humanities. One of these, that of Theology, is virtually non-existent. In 1835 a theological seminary was established apart from the Instituto Nacional, which at that time served as the state university. If theological students seek a degree in theology, they must obtain it from the University. Since, however, the church makes priests, and not the state, the students of the seminary do not in fact present themselves at the University. Curiously enough, nevertheless, one of the five Deans of the University represents Theology—a post which is purely and simply an historical survival.

Really there are several other minor schools, or colleges, within the University, such as Pharmacy, Dentistry, Architecture, Fine Arts, and Physical Education. All of the schools of the University are rigorously professional and more or less mutually exclusive. A student who has failed in one of them cannot transfer credits to another, but must start in with the first year again, if he is still desirous of pursuing an education in the University. There will be no courses that he can transfer, for each college has its own curriculum complete. Thus, chemistry will be taught in the colleges of Medicine, Engineering, and Pedagogy, and differently in each; so too with other courses.

The same exclusive principle turns up within each college. Thus in the Instituto Pedagógico (Pedagogical Institute, of which, more, presently) one may choose from among the various fields, such as Spanish, French, English, German, History and Geography, Mathematics, Physics and Chemistry, each representing a subject that is taught in the secondary schools. If one chooses History and Geography, he will assuredly have no time for any of the others, and similarly if he selects another field. All, indeed, are required to attend courses in pedagogy proper and to serve as practice teachers in the *liceo* which adjoins the Instituto Pedagógico. Another curious factor is that each course runs through the entire length of a university student's career. In the History of America, for example, the professor reaches Magellan in the first year, deals with the conquest in the second, takes up colonial institutions in the third, and treats of the wars of inde-

pendence and the republican era in the fourth. It may be said further that the subjects taught in the Instituto Pedagógico are precisely the same as those of the *liceos* and that the teachers are licensed to give instruction only in the subject which they have studied in the University. In rare instances a student is able to pass in more than one field, in which case he receives a title in each. From the above it will appear that the *liceo* is the one school which makes a pretense at breadth of education.

Whatever one may think of the system as a whole, there is much to be said in commendation of the methods within courses. Classes are taught with an emphasis on sources and criticism that one rarely finds, short of the graduate seminar, in the United States. The above mentioned class in the History of America, taught at present by Luis Puga, a thorough-going scholar, may be taken for purposes of illustration. A single volume work by the great Chilean historian Barros Arana is used as a text. This is not paralleled or duplicated at all by Professor Puga. He devotes his time to a discussion of the sources and to lectures on disputed points, such for example as the birthplace of Columbus. Twice a year the students are required to write papers on assigned topics. These papers, in the opinion of the present writer, are superior to the average term paper of students in our own universities. More attention is paid in them to sources and proof, with an apparent use of criticism, and less weight is given to mere accumulation of incident. The standards of the teacher are high, to the point of severity. Last year, in a class of twenty, only ten passed.

The Chilean professors make use of the recitation, but not of the periodical examination. The decision as to whether a student passes or fails is left to a veritable inquisition (resembling our doctoral examination) at the end of the year. In this examination the other professors of the particular college also take part. It may be written or oral or both, but usually it is oral.

Of the four leading colleges, that of Law unquestionably has the poorest reputation. It is said to be the easiest of all, though the course lasts five years and few are able to finish. If the reports one hears are true, the purely legal courses are least thorough, while those in international law, economics, political science, and other subjects which are annexed to the curriculum of this college have a somewhat better standing. It is a fact, however, that many of the students in this college add courses in some other field, especially among those of the Instituto Pedagógico—or, rather, many in the latter also take law,

in order to procure a title in another profession, whereby they may supplement their scanty emolument as teachers. This very largely accounts for the heavy registration in the college of Law. At the present time there are about 700 enrolled. Less than ten per cent remain through the five years and win the title.

The college of Medicine has some 600 students of whom about twenty a year receive the title of doctor. The course lasts six years, and is expensive as well as difficult, wherefore many drop out of their own accord. The same thing may be said of the college of Engineering, which, however, does not at present bear a particularly good reputation. There are about 300 students in this college. The course is six years long.

Philosophy and the Humanities are represented by the Instituto Pedagógico, which is the nearest approach that the Chileans have to a College of Letters and Science in our sense of the term. It has by far the highest reputation of the various colleges of the University. According to one writer, "this establishment is a model school, a center of lofty culture which honors the country. The teachers who are prepared there are competent and hard-working, and they acquire an arsenal of information." Of the 700 enrolled in this college some 400 are girls.

Graduate work is no part of the program of the University of Chile. None of the higher degrees are awarded; the title "Doctor" is applied only to physicians.

It must be apparent that the source of inspiration for Chilean education has been Germany. Chilean students who have gone to Europe for graduate study have usually attended German universities, and Germans have been procured for some of the most important educational posts in Chile; indeed, men of other nationality could not be persuaded to leave their country for the small salaries offered, but the German left the homeland easily, and was willing to remain in Chile at a modest wage. Having no longstanding educational tradition such as existed in the United States, the Chileans quite naturally followed the system with which they were best acquainted, that of Germany.

That Chile is still in its educational infancy can be well appreciated when it is understood that in a population of some 4,000,000, about half—sixty per cent according to some accounts—can neither read nor write, despite the fact that for a generation the law has provided that education should be free and *obligatory*. One must not forget, however, that the advances of recent years have been at a most gratifying

rate, and have been remarkable as concerns the education of women. In 1918, in some 3,000 primary schools there were 174,000 girls and 162,000 boys. Of the ninety *liceos*, some fifty were for girls. The girls numbered 13,000 and the boys 17,000. In various special schools—normal schools, industrial schools, etc.—there were more than 7,300 girls and less than 7,000 boys. In the University the exact figures were 941 young women and 3,287 men. Thirty years ago these figures would have been astounding. At the present rate of progress the Chileans may look ahead with assurance to the attainment of their educational aspirations in the not very distant future.

CHARLES E. CHAPMAN,
United States Exchange Professor to Chile.

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